UNITED
NATIONS

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Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.17/1993/12
4 June 1993

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Commission on Sustainable Development
First session
14-25 June 1993
Item 10 of the provisional agenda*

CONSIDERATION OF THE OUTCOME OF THE DISCUSSION ON THE ABOVE ITEMS, AS WELL AS OF URGENT AND MAJOR EMERGING ISSUES, AT THE HIGH-LEVEL MEETING OF THE FIRST SESSION OF THE COMMISSION

Report of the Secretary-General

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* E/CN.17/1993/4.

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INTRODUCTION

1. The first substantive meeting of the Commission on Sustainable Development is taking place exactly one year after the conclusion of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) at Rio de Janeiro on 14 June 1992. The primary focus of the follow-up to UNCED during the past year has been on the establishment of the Commission on Sustainable Development; the High-level Advisory Board; the Inter-agency Committee on Sustainable Development; and secretariat support arrangements. At the national level, many Governments are establishing mechanisms to ensure coordination and commitment in the follow-up process.

2. Taking into account the agenda for the first session and the need to provide clear policy directions for the future work of the Commission, discussions at the high-level meeting could focus on the following themes:

(a) Critical dimensions of sustainability;

(b) National implementation and decision-making structures;

(c) Financial resources;

(d) Technology transfer;

(e) United Nations system implementation.

3. The Commission has before it reports on the issue of finance (E/CN.17/1993/11) and technology transfer (E/CN.17/1993/10), which outline recommendations and issues for discussion. The Commission also has before it a report on follow-up activities in the United Nations system (E/CN.10/1993/8), which contains the text of a Statement to the Commission by the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC). In addition, this report places before the high-level meeting certain issues for discussion relating to national implementation and to the critical dimensions of sustainability that need to guide the work of the Commission.

I. CRITICAL DIMENSIONS OF SUSTAINABILITY

4. The transition to sustainability will depend crucially on an international economy that supports key environment and development goals, effective steps against poverty (particularly in developing countries), changes in consumption patterns and measures to ensure compatibility between demographic dynamics and sustainability. These areas for action are dealt with in chapters 2-5 of Agenda 21. 1/ The high-level meeting of the first session of the Commission may wish to focus on certain specific areas requiring international action.

5. With regard to the international economy, much of the content of Agenda 21 is under discussion in other forums. The high-level meeting may wish to discuss the extent to which sustainability considerations are being taken into account in ongoing discussions on:

(a) Trade policies in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and elsewhere;

(b) Structural adjustment policies;

(c) Macroeconomic adjustments in developed and developing countries.

6. There are certain other areas of action in which the high-level meeting may wish to consider more specific initiatives. The first of these is the link between trade and environment policies. Agenda 21 suggests that GATT, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and other relevant international and regional economic institutions should be asked to examine certain principles in order to develop an environment/trade and development agenda. The high-level meeting may wish to consider whether specific processes for intergovernmental discussions are required for developing further the principles enumerated on this subject in Agenda 21 (see para. 2.22 of Agenda 21).

7. Agenda 21 also deals with international commodity trade and trade diversification. The transition to sustainability in many developing countries that are dependent on a few key commodity exports will rely on effective progress in this area. The high-level meeting may wish to consider the specific initiatives that may be required for international commodity agreements, compensatory financing mechanisms, technical assistance and market access measures to promote diversification (see para. 2.16 of Agenda 21).

8. The links between poverty and environmental stress are recognized in Agenda 21 and the objective of providing all persons with an opportunity to earn a sustainable livelihood underlies chapter 3 as well as many other programme areas, notably those dealing with sustainable agriculture and rural development (chap. 14) and the management of fragile ecosystems (chaps. 12 and 13). An orientation in favour of the poor is also implicit in other programme areas dealing with health, education, human settlement, drinking water, sanitation etc.

9. In terms of action at the international level, Agenda 21 asks the United Nations system to make poverty alleviation a major priority and, inter alia, to:

(a) Assist countries, when requested, in formulating appropriate programmes;

(b) Promote technical cooperation and information exchange;

(c) Strengthen the coordination of action relating to poverty eradication;

(d) Establish a focal point for information exchange and the formulation and implementation of replicable pilot projects;

(e) Give high priority to the review of progress make in eradicating poverty (para. 3.10 of Agenda 21).

10. Poverty alleviation and related issues are discussed at the intergovernmental level in the General Assembly, in the Committee on Poverty of

UNCTAD and in intergovernmental discussions on such matters as the International Development Strategy and the New Agenda for the Development of Africa. Poverty alleviation will be a major theme of the forthcoming World Summit on Social Development, to be held in Copenhagen, 6-12 March 1995. The high-level meeting may wish to consider how consideration of this issue in the Commission could best add value to existing processes. It may also wish to consider the specific arrangements for coordination, information exchange and monitoring that would be appropriate.

11. The transition to sustainability will require changes in consumption patterns, particularly in the industrialized countries. This is recognized in chapter 4 of Agenda 21. The theme of changing consumption patterns is also implicit in other programme areas dealing with energy, transportation and wastes. With regard to national action, Agenda 21 draws attention to:

(a) Encouraging greater efficiency in the use of energy and resources;

(b) Minimizing the generation of wastes;

(c) Assisting individuals and households to make environmentally sound purchasing decisions;

(d) Exercising leadership through government purchasing;

(e) Moving towards environmentally sound pricing;

(f) Reinforcing values that support sustainable consumption (para. 4.22 of Agenda 21).

12. Consumption patterns are not the subject of intergovernmental discussion at present, although specific areas of consumption are discussed in some contexts. Hence, the high-level meeting may wish to consider more specific processes to give practical expression to the recommendation in Agenda 21 that reviewing the role and impact of unsustainable production and consumption patterns and lifestyles and their relation to sustainable development should be given high priority (para. 4.13 of Agenda 21).

13. The issue of population is dealt with in chapter 5 of Agenda 21. Population programmes are also dealt with in the discussion on poverty and the role of women. Demographic dynamics and population policies are discussed in other intergovernmental forums, such as the Population Commission; the Governing Council of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in the context of the United Nations Population Fund; and the Preparatory Committee for the International Conference on Population and Development, to be held in Cairo, 5-13 September 1994. The high-level meeting may wish to discuss how best discussions in the Commission on this subject can add value to existing processes specifically dedicated to this purpose.

II. NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION AND DECISION-MAKING STRUCTURES

14. Agenda 21 consists of approximately 2,500 activities spread over 115 programme areas. The majority of these are addressed to Governments for implementation at the national level. Agenda 21 recognizes that its successful implementation is first and foremost the responsibility of Governments (para. 1.3 of Agenda 21). It recommends that Governments should adopt a national strategy for sustainable development based on, inter alia, the implementation of decisions taken at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, particularly in respect of Agenda 21 (para. 8.7 of Agenda 21). In the discussion on national implementation, Agenda 21 recommends that:

(a) States could consider the preparation of national reports (para. 38.38 of Agenda 21);

(b) States may wish to consider setting up a national coordination structure responsible for the follow-up of Agenda 21 (para. 38.40 of Agenda 21).

15. Given the range of activities covered in Agenda 21, the national implementation of its recommendations will involve virtually every economic/development department. Moreover, effective implementation will require the active support of many groups outside the Government. Hence, the coordination structures suggested in Agenda 21 will have to be broad-based enough to include all relevant participants.

16. The manner in which this can be done will vary from country to country. It could take the form of an independent commission in the office of the chief executive, an interdepartmental coordinating group, a specific mandate for the national planning body, a national coordinating committee involving national and provincial administrations etc. The manner in which non-governmental organizations are brought into the process could also vary, as could the role of local authorities and parliamentary processes. The high-level meeting may wish to exchange views on this matter as well as the role of national coordination bodies in relation to the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development and of other intergovernmental bodies in which programmatic initiatives linked to Agenda 21 will be discussed.

17. An area of action that is closely linked to the national coordination of Agenda 21 implementation is dealt with in chapter 8 of Agenda 21, which contains four programme areas:

(a) Integrating environment and development at the policy, planning and management levels;

(b) Providing an effective legal and regulatory framework;

(c) Making effective use of economic instruments and market and other initiatives;

(d) Establishing systems to integrate environmental and economic accounting.

18. Effective implementation of Agenda 21 requires coordination processes not only for monitoring but also for catalyzing specific changes that will secure the integration of environment and development in the processes that determine economic/development policy and in sectoral decision-making structures. The high-level meeting may wish to exchange views and consider the need for a mechanism for the systematic exchange of ideas and information on this matter.

III. FINANCIAL RESOURCES

19. Although there have been a number of positive developments in the funding of Agenda 21, the general response so far observed to UNCED recommendations on funding has not been encouraging. The high-level meeting may wish to discuss how the Commission on Sustainable Development can assist in mobilizing the resources required for the implementation of Agenda 21.

20. The Commission has a number of functions which involve the review and monitoring of information provided by Governments, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations on the implementation of Agenda 21, the provision of funding for that purpose, and progress towards the target of 0.7 per cent of the gross national product of developed countries being allocated for official development assistance (ODA). The high-level meeting may wish to consider the modalities and format for providing information to the Commission, as well as the need to redesign data-classification schemes to make it possible to assess the flow of development finance for specific Agenda 21 clusters.

21. Agreed assessments of availability, need and related policy matters in relation to the financial requirements of the different parts of Agenda 21 could help to guide further discussions of the Commission and provide a suitable and common basis for further action by bilateral and multilateral funding organizations. They would provide a basis for the Commission on Sustainable Development to discuss the replenishment of specific facilities, set priorities for aid programmes and monitor financial matters. Specific pledges and commitments would continue to be made in the discussions between funding organizations and individual recipients.

22. One possibility that could be considered is the establishment of a series of ad hoc groups of professional experts named partly by countries, partly by international financial institutions and partly by concerned specialized agencies. The high-level meeting may wish to consider the establishment of this or another appropriate mechanism to make such agreed assessments.

IV. TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER

23. The need to develop information networks which link national, subregional, regional and international systems is specifically identified in chapter 34 and other chapters of Agenda 21. Indeed, the need for improved information and data-processing systems is evident in most chapters of Agenda 21 and may need to be addressed on a cross-sectoral basis. At present, several information systems and networks are in the process of being created. While decentralized systems may reach more users than a single centralized system, there is a need for

better coordination among systems and for standardization of data collection and retrieval. The high-level meeting may wish to review the current situation and recommend modalities for coordination and standardization among various information systems related to the transfer of environmentally sound technologies, cooperation and capacity-building.

24. In the area of technology assessment, increasing attention needs to be placed on building and strengthening national capacities which link assessment to decision-making. Emphasis is also needed on coordinating the many different technology assessment activities within the United Nations system; providing information on similar activities being undertaken by national Governments, non-governmental organizations and the private sector; and standardizing methodologies for assessment. The high-level meeting may wish to consider the need for a focal point for technology assessment within the United Nations system that could both serve as a clearing-house for information and referrals and oversee work on methodologies and their standardization.

25. Support and promotion of access to the transfer of technology is directly related to commitments made as part of international agreements and conventions on the environment. These commitments are closely related to commitments on financing. The high-level meeting may wish to consider how best to monitor the implementation of such commitments.

26. Technology transfer involves a variety of non-governmental entities, including transnational corporations. The high-level meeting of the Commission may wish to consider the modalities for its interaction with these organizations and its relationship with relevant intergovernmental bodies, such as the Commission on Transnational Corporations, that deal with this issue.

V. UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM IMPLEMENTATION

27. With regard to the follow-up of Agenda 21 in the United Nations system, the high-level meeting may wish to consider the issues raised in the ACC Statement to the Commission on Sustainable Development.

VI. OTHER ISSUES

28. In addition to the issues raised above, the high-level meeting may wish to consider specific initiatives in some of the areas dealt with in Agenda 21 in order to give practical expression to the principles of partnership between countries and between Governments and non-governmental organizations that underlie Agenda 21.

Notes

1/ Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992, vol. I, Resolutions Adopted by the Conference (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8), resolution 1, annex II.